



AVOIDING SHIFTS IN PERSON

As you have seen, shifts in grammatical structure can confuse your readers. Similarly, shifts in person can confuse your readers. The most common shift is from *first* person (I, we) or *third* person (he, she, it, they) to *second* person (you). For example, look at the following sentence.

We have to be careful at the picnic because *you* could get a sunburn.

The writer probably means: “*We* should be careful not to get sunburned.” But the sentence seems to be talking about *two different groups of people: we and you*. The shift in person is confusing.

IN SUMMARY: To avoid confusing shifts in person, decide which person -first, second, or third- is most appreciate for your paper, and then use that person throughout.

EXERCISE 5

The following passage contains many shifts in person. Decide which person -first, second, or third- would be best for the passage and revise it, making your changes above the lines.

- (1.) At this moment, more than \$ 4 billion in lost treasure is waiting for you to discover it. (2.) A person can find gold mines whose owners died without revealing their locations. (3.) Or we could find loot buried by robbers like Jesse James or Ma Baker before they were killed or sent to jail.(4.) Getting information about treasures may mean that you will have to spend many hours in libraries going over ancient newspaper or books. (5.) But a single coin can make one rich for a few years.
- (2.) To be a successful treasure hunter, one should have the heart and mind of Sherlock Holmes, but you should also have a piece of modern equipment called a metal detector. (7.) It can cost a person anywhere from \$20 to \$1,000. (8.) Even the less expensive ones will allow us to find lost coins and watches on a sandy beach. (9.) But the best detectors will help you find large deposits of metal in the earth. (10.) Most treasure hunters have been unsuccessful, but you or I might be the lucky one.



AVOIDING SHIFTS IN TENSE

Sometimes when you write, you can become so involved in your subject that you forget what tense you began your paper in and so switch to another one. The results can be confusing and annoying, as in this example.

A man boards the bus and sits beside me. He lights up a cigarette, even though the sign in the front says, “No smoking.” I was really angry.

The last sentence says that you were angry before the man lit his cigarette. Obviously, you should have written, “I *am* really angry.”

So as you proofread your paper, note the tense of your verbs. If you find illogical tense in shifts, correct them. Here is a handy question to keep asking: Is this happening *now*, *in the past*, or in the *future*.

IN SUMMARY: To avoid illogical shifts in tense,

1. proofread your papers, paying close attention to your verbs;
 2. keep asking yourself: Is this happening now, in the past, or in the future?
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